

Memorandum

To: Greg Summers
From: Summer Advising Task Force
Re: Recommendations
Date: August 26, 2013

The Summer Advising Task Force (SATF) met on an almost-weekly basis throughout the summer, reviewing the report provided by the advising external review team and considering the charges issued by that team and you, as well as considerations made by department chairs in two separate surveys about advising needs. The members of the SATF spent most of our time working toward creating a formal strategic plan for advising at UW-Stevens Point. To that end, we developed the following:

Definition: Academic advising is a developmental process whereby students collaborate with advisors to clarify academic, career, and life goals and to create and implement educational plans to achieve those goals.

Mission: Academic advising at UW-Stevens Point engages students in a guided teaching and learning process that empowers them to define and achieve their academic, career, and life goals.

Vision: UW-Stevens Point aspires to model excellence in student-centered advising.

Values: The values associated with academic advising at the University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point are closely aligned with the stated values of the university. We value academic advising services that are

- **Student-Centered:** The primary goal of academic advising is student success in curricular and co-curricular activities.
- **Inclusive:** Academic advising is available to all students and tailored to meet the unique needs of each individual.
- **Educational:** Academic advising encourages students to think critically, solve problems, act independently, and embrace lifelong learning.
- **Collaborative:** Academic advising empowers students and advisors to use campus and community resources in making decisions that are informed, consistent, and effective.
- **Responsible:** Academic advising encourages students to own their academic decisions through an intentional academic partnership, and prepares students to actively contribute to society.

You asked us to think about how advising could be improved on campus, assuming no additional resources were available to help make those improvements. Working from within that assumption, we offer the following recommendations.

1. ***Mandatory advising should continue.*** Students should still need to be cleared by an advisor prior to registering for courses each semester. However, the current models being used in and around departments should not be considered the only acceptable models. Departments and academic units could use online training modules, group advising, or peer advising at other times during the semester. Students who produce an acceptable course plan might be cleared to register for multiple semesters. The current model being used – waiting to begin advising until the timetable is released each semester – encourages students to think of advising as something only related to the scheduling of classes. This attitude is reinforced by advisors who feel and tell students that they need to hold all their advising appointments during a very limited time frame.
2. ***We should not change the advising model currently used on campus ... yet.*** We currently utilize a “split” model of advising. This is a type of shared model that includes faculty advisors, professional advisors situated in departments, and professional advisors concentrated in a central advising office (the SAAC, in our case). We do not advocate moving away from this model at this time. However, we can and should explore different models as new resources – such as funds from differential tuition – become available.

Advising Contacts. While we do not feel moving away from our current model is a good idea at this time, several elements about our current practices can be improved. First, units across campus demonstrate a great deal of inconsistency in advising formats. Some units have embedded professional advisors and peer advising programs, for example, while other units use faculty advisors only. One format is not necessarily better than another; however, ***it might be desirable for units to identify a primary advising contact.*** This contact might be one or more persons in an advising office, a faculty or staff member, or administrator. Units in which a faculty member is a primary advising contact might consider offering some sort of incentive to take on the extra advising responsibilities. Units considering this model should target tenured faculty members, preferably those for whom research responsibilities have been reduced. In addition, regular professional development activities for those contacts should be encouraged or required. Primary contacts could consider engaging in scholarship related to advising activities. Funds should be made available to send contacts to local, state, regional, or national advising workshops or conferences.

Master Advisors. Campus units also demonstrate inconsistency with regard to understanding and promotion of General Education requirements. ***Another change we recommend involves the identification of “Master Advisors” within colleges.*** Master Advisors could be responsible for a number of activities, including providing GEP

advising within colleges, training other advisors in the colleges about GEP concerns, mentoring new advisors, or serving as an advising resource to colleagues.

Department/Unit Orientation Advising. Campus units provide inconsistent advising during orientation, much of which can be attributed to the differing levels of skill and interest demonstrated by department chairs/heads, most of whom are responsible for advising for freshman and transfer students. ***We recommend this responsibility be decoupled from the department chair role.*** Responsibility for orientation advising could be given to Master Advisors or other faculty or staff members. Compensation rates for chairs during summer could be adjusted to account for the decrease in responsibilities and the resulting funds provided as a stipend for the faculty member willing to be trained in and provide orientation advising services. Alternatively, some sort of load reassignment might be arranged for consecutive semesters/summers of orientation advising.

Individuals responsible for orientation advising should attend a mandatory orientation advising “boot camp.” Those who are good at orientation advising should be identified as resources for those who want to improve. Departments could have standardized “scripts” to use when talking about university requirements such as the GEP. Every department should have a portable set of materials that can be accessed by a substitute if necessary. Any of these ideas might help improve the consistency and quality of advising offered during orientation, and, in doing so, help students better understand the relationship of advising to their own academic success.

Student Orientation to Advising. One of the problems identified by the external review and the task force relates to our (in)ability to nurture positive student attitudes toward advising. We recommend some extra attention be paid to this topic during the large orientation meetings. In addition, we recommend that advising importance and success be part of the yearly Welcome Week activities.

3. ***A permanent advisors’ council, overseen by the Office of Academic Affairs, should be established.*** This council should be responsible for seeking information from, and reporting about advising issues to, appropriate governance and administrative bodies. As Academic Affairs is the logical home for advising-related activities, the council should operate under the purview of the Provost or the Associate Chancellor for Teaching, Learning, and Academic Programs. The council should be convened at a level similar to that held by the Strategic Planning Committee, whose charge is included in the *Constitution of the Faculty Senate of the University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point*, but is not part of formal university governance.

The advising council should be responsible for creating and implementing the following:

- a. A strategic plan for advising across campus;

- b. An assessment template for departments to use as part of the advising assessment now mandated for Department Review (working in conjunction with the Department Review Subcommittee and the Assessment Coordinator); and
- c. Regular training for new and existing advisors (in partnership with the Student Academic Advising Center, Master Advisors, and our eventual teaching and learning center).

Members of the council should include administrators, faculty advisors, professional advisors, students and/or peer advisors, and representatives from advising-affiliated offices, such as Residential Living. In addition, the council must be able to collaborate with whichever form of teaching and learning center we establish on campus. This collaboration will not only allow the council to have input upon important advising initiatives on campus, but also support the actual and assumed missions of both entities.

4. ***We must use technology to provide consistent, up-to-date information to current and future students, parents, and advisors.*** In particular, we advocate the following:
 - a. The creation of a searchable database of materials advisors can use to improve their own advising effectiveness. This database might include FAQs, best practices, advising worksheets, calendars of advising activities, etc. Logically, this information would be housed within a Teaching & Learning center. However, as we do not have one of those, this would be a good option for now. This should be one of the first tasks for the permanent advisors' council.
 - b. The creation and publication of standardized planning sheets for each major and minor program on campus, centrally located for easy access by students, parents, and advisors. We recognize that this capability will likely come with our new SIS, but between now and the time the new SIS is implemented, it should be easy to collect and post this information in a single, searchable location.
 - c. The addition of a standardized "Advising" link to department/unit web pages. Standardized and individual information should be available, including a list of FAQs, information about deadlines, program requirements, advising contacts, and the like.
 - d. A close examination of programs whose requirements do not list "hidden" or "buried" courses, including those courses which are unlisted prerequisites for major or minor requirements, and update of those requirements on printed materials. We must have truth in advertising in all our academic programs.
 - e. The production of online advising training modules for students. These could be targeted toward students according to characteristics such as year in school or major status. Modeled upon the training for the use of human subjects in research, each module could be accessed and assessed online, and results of those assessments could be sent to advisors to demonstrate students' understanding and allow advisors to clear students to register for

classes. The National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) is an excellent resource for identifying what students should be able to demonstrate at various levels of their educational programs.

- f. The production of online advising training modules for advisors, with a similar format as those created for students. These could be updated when requirements or policies change, and should cover a wide variety of advising issues that can be accessed as needed.
- g. Student work groups could be used to help create and maintain the modules described in e and f. For example, the Division of Communication regularly teaches a course in Training and Development. Students in that course could work with Master Advisors, the advisors' council, etc. to identify elements of the needed training, design it, and assess its success. Students in WDMD courses might be tapped to then put those ideas into an appropriate online environment. Student actors and video production teams might produce necessary video elements. Any of these could provide Experiential Learning activities, which would support the GEP.

5. ***Departments/units must be encouraged to think more creatively about how to provide advising to students.*** For instance, departments should identify faculty advisors who can specialize in GEP advising and others who can concentrate on advising students about internships, professional preparation, graduate school, etc. In this manner, every faculty member would have advising responsibilities, but they would not necessarily be the *same* advising responsibilities. Departments might also consider offering an orientation course for new majors or students who are "shopping" for a new major. A mandatory course (for credit or not) can be an efficient way to provide consistent advising related to major requirements, career paths, and department resources to a large number of students. If considered part of load, student and colleague evaluations can be collected. Either of these options would enable the university to consider advising effectiveness as part of the R-P-T process, and provide a context from within which it can be measured.
6. ***The university must find a way to re-introduce advising as a component of teaching.*** Advising is teaching. Advisors are teachers. We must, as a campus, determine how to treat them as such. This process could begin with something as simple as requiring departments/units to distribute and maintain advising syllabi to their majors.
7. ***We must find ways to offer positive and negative sanctions for advising activities.*** Developing and implementing a campus-wide advising assessment plan might go a long way toward achieving this goal. We need to stop allowing ignorance about how to assess advising dominate discussions about whether it should be done. Models and resources abound to help us make this happen. We need to tap into resources, such as those available through NACADA, to help us asses advising in a way that benefits our students and our advising program.

We should establish university advising awards for staff and faculty. We should highlight the many awards our advisors win at state and regional levels. We should highlight professional development activities related to advising in the same way we do those related to our academic disciplines. Reinventing *The Sundial* might be one way to showcase these types of activities. Another might be to include advising scholarship as a regular component of the annual teaching conference.

Similarly, we must find a way to negatively sanction departments, units, and advisors whose advising success falls short of expectations. We need to be willing, for example, to take open faculty lines away from ineffective departments and re-allocate those lines to advising staff.

8. ***We must move as quickly as possible to adopt whichever new SIS we plan to implement.*** Many of the decisions about what we can and need to do to improve advising will depend upon the functionality of the new system, and the learning curve associated with it. We must ensure that advisors are part of the design team used to tailor the program to our needs.
9. ***We must deliberately and purposefully incorporate advising into the university's strategic plan.*** While identifying advising as an important component of the strategic plan for our teaching and learning activities is helpful, it is not sufficient. Strong advising is essential to the success of the four arms of UW-Stevens Point's strategic plan: Advancing Learning, Enhancing Living, Leveraging Resources, and Honoring our Legacy. Introducing improvements to advising in the action plans for each area might help broaden the campus's understanding about the scope of advising and its importance to a thriving campus community.
10. ***We must be willing to re-structure FTE freed up by movement into the new GEP.*** While we recognize that FYS courses are needed, we do not feel that the FYS should be the only beneficiary of FTE freed up by the switch to the new GEP. Departments with consistently under-enrolled courses should be encouraged to invite faculty with an interest in and aptitude for advising to consider adopting enhanced advising duties as part of their contractual responsibilities, and faculty interested in pursuing this track should be provided with the necessary professional development opportunities and institutional support.